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"We are tired of tiptoeing up to society and asking for reform. We're ready to kick it in the balls."[1]

March 2, 1970, 18 West 11th St., Greenwich Village, N.Y.

A small group of intelligent, ambitious, and privileged young men and women were living in an elegant townhouse owned by Cathlyn Wilkerson's millionaire father, away on an extended vacation in the Caribbean. Cathlyn, 25 at the time and a graduate of Swarthmore College, was relaxing upstairs with Kathy Boudin, 26, an honors graduate in Russian Literature from Bryn Mawr, and the daughter of a well-known civil liberties attorney. Working in the basement were Ted Gold, 23 and a graduate of Columbia University; Terry Robbins, 21, a college dropout; and Diana Oughton, 28, also from Bryn Mawr, a former Peace Corps volunteer, and the daughter of a wealthy Illinois farmer.

Someone goofed. The wrong wires must have been crossed. The bomb they had been building in the basement—studded with long roofing nails for added effect—went off. The nearby boxes of dynamite also blew. The townhouse was leveled almost instantly, leaving a huge crater, but nothing of Ted, Terry, and Diana. Incredibly, Cathlyn and Kathy, half-naked, were able to crawl from the rubble, dazed but alive.[2] They ran to Kathy's parents' nearby home, where Kathy's mother saw her, momentarily, for the last time until 1981.[3]

October, 1981, Metropolitan Correction Center, Manhattan

The next time Kathy's mother saw her, she was in solitary confinement. She and three others had been captured during a failed "shoot-'em-up" robbery of a Brink's armored car. One Brink's guard was killed and two wounded outside of the Nanuet National Bank, and two police officers were killed at a roadblock in nearby Nyack, N.Y.[4] Two of the suspects were, like Kathy, former members of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the Weathermen (or Weather Underground, after the former title was deemed sexist), as well as children of privilege: Judith Clark, then 31 and a graduate of the University of Chicago, and David Gilbert, the son of a former Republican mayor of conservative New Rochelle, N.Y., and the father of Kathy's child.[5]

This, then, was the revolution.

April 22, 1968, Columbia University

In an open letter to Grayson Kirk, the staid president of Columbia University, Mark Rudd, the dynamic twenty-year-old leader of Columbia's SDS (and a soon-to-be Weatherman), made explicit SDS intentions: "You call for order and respect for authority; we call for justice, freedom and socialism. There is only one thing left to say. It may sound nihilistic to you, since it is the opening shot in a war of liberation. . . . 'Up against the wall, motherfucker, this is a stick-up.'"[6]

SDS was the largest student organization the United States had ever seen. The leading expression of the so-called New Left for most of the sixties, SDS organized against U.S. aggression in Vietnam, the oppression of blacks in the "land of the free," and the general moral corruption of the establishment. More moderate pacifist and socialist groups wanted to "Bring the Boys Home"; SDS had as a slogan, "Bring the War Home."[7]

The Columbia chapter of SDS was protesting against both the University's confidential research for the U.S. Department of Defense and its planned expansion into the poor, black neighborhood of Harlem. When Mark Rudd and the students of Columbia marched into Low Memorial Library on April 23, they showed the New Left where success was to be found—direct confrontation with authority. The police went in and cracked student skulls, beat up harmless bystanders, evicted the protesters, and provided SDS with a great victory (e.g., Mark Rudd on the cover of *Newsweek*). The brutal vindictiveness of the police—read "establishment"—was proven. Rudd and his militant "action faction" quickly gained the sympathy, if not the admiration, of most campus liberals. Where public forums and policy papers had failed, a direct assault had succeeded.

That June at the SDS National Convention in East Lansing, Michigan, one could sense the shift in the young attitudes of these "radical chic."[8] When Bernardine Dohrn, a hip and beautiful University of Chicago Law School graduate, stepped to the microphone on stage, the question from the audience was, as a candidate for Inter-Organizational Secretary of SDS, did she consider herself a socialist? "I consider myself a revolutionary communist," she answered. Dohrn was easily elected.[9]

At the next year's SDS National Convention, an anxious group of rebels, led by Bernardine Dohrn and Mark Rudd, among others, released a statement spelling out their view of SDS' future direction. This proclamation, from which this militant sub-group of SDSers was to take its name, was entitled, "You Don't Need a Weatherman to Know Which Way the Wind Blows," from the Bob Dylan song, "Subterranean

Homesick Blues" (some astute opponents pointed out that "you don't need a rectal thermometer to know who the assholes are"[10]). It inveighed against racism, economic and political despotism, and various other social ills. The Weathermen solutions, however, were vague calls for a world revolution—NOW!

At this 1969 gathering, the idea that SDS would be a moderate force for change within the system died. Mark Rudd, whose confrontation politics had won Columbia, was elected National President, and Billy Ayers, the one aching to kick society in the balls (and whose father was Chairman of the Board of Commonwealth Edison[11]), was elected Education Secretary.[12] In taking official control of SDS, these Weathermen, as they were to be known, moved SDS away from many of its relatively moderate constituents, who were not willling or able to make an ultimate and potentially bloody "revolutionary" commitment.

Tom Hayden, now a California General Assemblyman, and a first-generation SDSer (National President, 1962-63), had his doubts about Weathermen attitudes: "To us [his generation of SDS] revolution was like birth: blood is inevitable, but the purpose of the act is to create life, not to glorify blood. Yet to the Weathermen, bloodshed as such was 'great.'"[13] Indeed, one can see that in rushing away from their privileged suburban youths, they were always looking for the ultimate "break-on-thru-to-the-other-side" revolutionary stance, whether it was "smashing monogamy," extolling the virtues of Charles Manson, or blowing themselves up.

May 23, 1985 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

In November, 1982, Dr. Alan Berkman was released on $25,000 bail after a Federal Grand Jury indicted him as an accessory after the fact in the Brink's robbery. The Federal Bureau of Investigation claimed that he had treated one of the robbers after she shot herself while driving a get-away car. She was reputed to be the only white member of the militant Black Liberation Army, which had planned the Brink's action along with remnants of the Weathermen and other assorted revolutionaries, collected under the banner of the May 19th Communist Movement. (May 19 is the common birthday of Ho Chi Minh, Malcolm X, and, coincidentally, Kathy Boudin.)

Three months after posting his bail, Alan failed to appear at a pre-trial hearing in Manhattan. Now, two-and-a-half years later, the FBI had found him again. His car was forced to pull over. He and one Elizabeth Duke, both carrying loaded revolvers in their laps, surrendered quietly.[14] Alan currently resides in Holmesburg Prison, Philadelphia.

While never a member of SDS or the Weathermen, Alan Berkman was one of those moderate student supporters, who in the end, *was* willing to make a "great revolutionary commitment." And just as the anxious militants Dohrn, Rudd, *et al.*, had to break free of their established SDS roots in order to proceed with their vision of change ("We were exorcising Devil America . . . Our parents had failed us . . . perverted us. Our education had left us hopelessly enmeshed in endless lies."[15]), so too did Alan have to break away from his middle-class roots in order to be true to his conscience. But as the Weathermen's vision of their Utopia became distorted, Alan has tried to steer away from hypocrisy and remember his youthful ideals.

Alan grew up in Middletown, N.Y., a quintessential, American-dream small town. His father ran a small wholesale plumbing and heating business, and stayed out of politics. The extent of Alan's political involvement in high school was the Eagle Scouts. He says now that "nothing was challenging me to do more than I was doing, which was to do well at school, have a good time, to have a social consciousness, and go to medical school, and to live my own life. That's where so much of my generation really was." He was voted most-likely-to-succeed in high school, and now, in light of recent events, he says wryly, "I'd love to go back to my next high school reunion."[16]

He went off to Cornell University in the fall of 1963 without any political perspective, except for, perhaps, the "most vague sense" of Kennedy liberalism. Once there, the world began to change. President Kennedy was shot that November. American involvement in Vietnam was deepening. The Cornell chapter of SDS was slowly growing. He first approached these changes from an intellectual standpoint, wanting simply to understand what was happening. He eventually became active against the war in Vietnam and argued for greater civil rights for blacks in this country, but, he says, "always from a liberal perspective, that the system was basically a sound one, although it needed to be reformed."[17] He could not yet identify with those who called for revolution, who wanted to overturn society. Life at Cornell, in beautiful upstate New York was still very secure.

While Alan sympathized with SDS on the major issues of the day, participating in large demonstrations, he was never a member. Asked why today, he gives three reasons. First, he was hesitant to accept their overall condemnation of American society. He hoped that U.S. aggression in Southeast Asia and the treatment of blacks at home were isolated mistakes. Today, though, he points to U.S. actions in Central America and Libya, and the treatment of Native Americans and Puerto Rican nationalists, and says the government is still hopelessly

repressive. Second, draft-card burning was a major campaign of SDS'. Since he had a guaranteed four-year deferment with medical school ahead, why blow it? Finally, he laments, "SDS, in the early days, just wasn't 'cool' enough. Alas, it's true."[18]

In the spring of 1967, Alan's last semester at Cornell, he was confronted by life outside of idyllic Ithaca, N.Y. Stokely Carmichael, the eloquent leader of the Black Panther Party, came to speak: "A black man needs a black panther on his side when he and his family must endure . . . eviction, starvation, and sometimes death, for political activity. He may also need a gun. . . . "[19]

Alan was struck not so much by the extreme demands of Carmichael's politics as he was by the basic questions raised about his own white world, and the luxury afforded him just because of his color. What, asked Carmichael, could "moderate reform" do for the blacks of Lowndes County, Alabama? The average annual income was said to be $943. Eighty percent of the population was black, and eighty-six white families owned 90 percent of the land.[20] Alan was not sure what to think. The entire basis of his exclusively white, middle-class world was being challenged:

> *The auditorium was totally jammed when he came to talk. I hadn't gotten there early enough to get a seat . . . so I stood in the back. He began talking about the US from the perspective of a radical black man. . . . He was saying, 'No, it's not a basically sound system that can be reformed. There are a lot of black people who don't have the power to change it. . . . ' I remember . . . walking back—Cornell is a very beautiful place—and feeling a little numb—about the idea that there was a totally different reality that other people were experiencing . . . It totally shook me to my core . . . and it created an inner conflict—like, what was I going to do, how much did it mean to me to help?*[21]

Alan shared his feelings with his parents: "I hadn't realized how much what I was was a product of having the chance to be white, male, middle-class, and educated." If he worked to achieve what he had always been taught to strive for, would his successes further disempower black and poor Americans? His parents were sympathetic to his concern for others, but they said, "Do what you can, but don't let it become a major thing; live your own life." His parents had not gone to college, and they had gotten ahead by working hard. Their son could do the same. Does not everyone from Middletown have the same opportunities?

By the time Alan reached Columbia Medical School, he suspected that was not true. He had committed himself to help bring change.

During his second semester at Columbia, spring, 1968, he was driven by events to go beyond passive protest. Led by Mark Rudd, the students confronted the intractable behemoth that was Columbia University. Alan stayed out of the buildings and tended the wounded with other medical students:

This was the first time I saw the police play a very ideological role. . . . I was ducking clubs, trying to drag people away. And red cross or not [on his armband], they were swinging. The reason why people were calling them pigs was not an abstraction to me anymore.[22]

Alan was one of many won over by Rudd's "up-against-the-wall" politics. He remembers thinking that the SDSers were "the only white people willing to put their bodies where their mouths were."[23] There was a basic problem with a system which encouraged its leading universities to beat its students. The activists would have to be more aggressive in the future and actively resist the authorities. After Columbia, the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., the riots in Chicago, and the Tet offensive, Alan was calling himself a socialist. The Weathermen would soon blow themselves up and Alan would continue with medical school.

He remained committed to becoming a doctor, but he questioned how he would relate to the rest of society in that role. He received an internship at Columbia Presbyterian (CP), a highly-respected academic hospital. As good as he was at academic research, Alan did not want to ". . . get caught up in the siren song of academic medicine. It was too far from what was happening. . . . I was afraid I'd never leave it, that I'd find an excuse. . . . "

He was faced with the fact that at CP, at *his* hospital, only the "interesting" cases would be admitted. Before admitting a patient, he had to ask, "Would this be an intellectually stimulating disease? Would this be interesting for other students?" The surgeons, his supposed mentors, would moan, "Oh, don't send me another gall bladder." The gall bladders—and other more critical, but less interesting cases—would be sent on a fifty-block ride to Harlem Hospital. Unless, that is, one's personal battery of physicians happened to be at CP. Those who paid for private rooms were, of course, not sent down to Harlem. Alan learned about the ". . . two classes of medicine and what it means in this society to be rich or poor."[24]

The Weather Underground was going nowhere fast in the early seventies. Despite numerous "actions" since the Greenwich Village tragedy—which was now regarded as the "epiphany of the new revolutionary self"[25]—including the harmless detonation of a bomb in

the U.S. Capitol, the masses had yet to rise in support of the revolution. The war in Vietnam was winding down and the Weather Underground was losing its most overt example of U.S. imperialism. In addition, the Watergate crisis lost its revolutionary potency when the system itself disposed of President Nixon. Mark Rudd, the once-and future leader of the New Left, said goodbye to the group in 1971. Most of them had been on the run for two or three years when Rudd asked, "For what? What were we accomplishing?"[26] He moved to Santa Fe and became Tony Goodman, carpenter. Today, he teaches shop at the Albuquerque Technical-Vocational Institute.[27]

As some Weatherpeople began to have their doubts about the efficacy of their movement, Alan became more committed than ever. In February of 1973, approximately two to three hundred native American Indians took control of the settlement of Wounded Knee, S.D., in a protest over the elections of tribal leaders. Federal marshals and FBI agents laid siege for nearly two months. Alan flew out from New York with a team of medical support people. The weather was cold, and the settlement was blockaded from food and water. No help for the Indians, Alan's group was told, as they tried to go in. ("There's even Red Cross in wartime!")

The battle lines were drawn even more clearly than they had been at Columbia. Alan and his people sneaked through the prairie at night, hoping the marshals would not "mistake" them for an Indian attack. "Who was the lunatic fringe? Those people [the protesters] had .22s and the government had machine guns." Alan had to check where he was in this society, what his role was going to be. "It was one of the first times I ever decided to do something no matter what authorities said, even though I knew it might mean the end of my medical career or that I could even be killed."

While inside the settlement, he had an experience which confirmed everything he had thought about "two realities" and the need to change things. He was tending a young Indian woman about to give birth. She had already been in labor twelve hours. The risk of infection was extremely high. She needed to get to a hospital; a caesarian section would be best. Alan told her she had to leave. She refused. When asked why, she replied, "Because I want my baby to be born free and this is the only place."

> *Here she was willing to risk her life. You can read the books about broken treaties . . . but this told me historic wrongs don't just go away. It takes real people. . . . people being able to determine their own destinies. Well, what was I willing to risk? You can't deal with people and have integrity and say 'I support you'. . . . without joining them in the fight.*[28]

The beginning of the end was that day in 1970, in Greenwich Village. The Weather Underground still suffered for the rest of the decade, though, one revolutionary spirit dying after another. The leadership became a small band of die-hard communists, and called themselves the Central Committee. They moved from city to city, becoming more isolated from society, their followers, and their revolutionary ideals. They became preoccupied with "gut-checking," screaming at one another, looking for signs of "bourgeois cowardice."[29] They encouraged members to break free of their white-skin values by participating in orgies and drug binges, and by admiring Manson and the Tate Eight: "Dig it. First they killed those pigs, then they ate dinner in the same room with them, they even shoved a fork into a victim's stomach!" Bernardine Dohrn now says, "That's what we were about—being crazy motherfuckers and scaring the shit out of honky America."[30]

Todd Gitlin, an early (1963-64) president of SDS puts it another way: "One senses the Weathermen were awed by their own bravado, and by the thrill of having gotten away with mayhem. For them there was, as their unwilling poet, Bob Dylan, put it, 'no success like failure.' But they ignored the next line: 'and failure's no success at all.'"[31]

As Dohrn and the remaining original Weathermen lost touch, they also lost control. At the Hard Times Conference in Chicago in 1976, a collection of the remaining "revolutionary" organizations, the black caucus rose and denounced the Weather Underground as racist. It had forgotten the goal of a new black nation, its ties to the Third World, and the leadership was betraying revolutionary principles. Dohrn and company put themselves on trial before a new Central Committee. They were expunged from their movement for "crimes against national liberation, women, and the anti-imperialist left."[32] Mark Rudd surrendered to authorities in 1977 and received two years probation and was fined. Cathlyn Wilkerson, whose father owned the townhouse, surfaced in 1980 and was sentenced to three years.[33] Bernardine Dohrn and Billy Ayers turned themselves in later that year; she was given probation and fined,[34] and charges against Ayers had been dropped years before. Upon hearing this, he revealed his extant revolutionary spirit: "Guilty as hell, free as a bird—America is a great country."[35]

The Weather Underground had effectively self-destructed. After all, Dohrn and Ayers had to pay the rent and raise their son. Still, Kathy Boudin and a dedicated few retained their visions and continued the fight. They and other assorted revolutionaries and activists, including Alan Berkman, formed the May 19th Communist Movement. They joined with the BLA somewhere on the way to revolution and took a detour to Nyack, N.Y., where three people died in the Brink's action.

After that failed "expropriation," the FBI came to Alan. He claims they told him that if he cooperated, they would give him a new identity. If he did not, he would never practice medicine again—he would be in jail for the rest of his life. Alan said forget it. He was jailed for seven months for contempt. He was indicted as an accessory after the fact for treating a suspect's wound and released on bail. He decided he could be a more effective political person if he went underground. He left his wife and nine-year-old daughter. "Yes, I miss them. . . . But I am a revolutionary. Basically, I'm proud of my life," he says today, awaiting trial and undergoing treatment for Hodgkin's disease.[36]

"I have a different vision, a different view of history." He knows that revolution is not on the horizon in this country. Still, people need to resist the repressive nature of the system. The movement is not strong enough to force change, but " . . . at least we can be part of the problem the US government has. . . . "

Just as the police wanted to crush the students at Columbia and in Chicago in the sixties, the powers-that-be in this country attempt to suppress any threats to the status quo today. A movement such as the one of which Alan is a part cannot exercise any political rights, he says. Any activity is immediately labeled "terrorism." He points to his "wanted" posters as an example. The FBI described him as "armed and extremely dangerous." What was he wanted for, he asks? For doing his job as a doctor and treating a patient.

Violence, Alan points out, is used by revolutionaries only in self-defense. The poster criminalizes him and " . . . creates in the mind the idea that what revolutionaries are about is not decency or freedom, but that it's about shoot 'em up. . . . People who suffer usually don't want to make other people suffer. They want to create circumstances where nobody suffers."[37]

Alan has long wanted to help bring about such a society. You cannot be a revolutionary without being an idealist, he says. In the beginning, the Weathermen were idealists, but in the end, most were nothing but a pack of spoiled and disillusioned brats who suddenly found it was time to grow up. Within their communes, they railed against their parents' bourgeois values, but they were willing to accept the dividend checks their "white-skin privilege" brought. It seemed that they felt guilty for having been born so lucky. But rather than building a community in which everyone could enjoy the wealth, they envisioned a society in which no one did.

Alan has always retained his spirit of optimism. He has a very fundamental belief that people can and must take control of their lives and produce positive change. He left behind the calm scenes of

Middletown and Ithaca, but carried with him the hope and idealism he found there:

And there was always this question of, 'What did the principles mean? Did they mean enough to get arrested?' Throughout my life, I had to make this kind of decision at different points. 'Could I live with that, even if it meant not being a doctor?' You take the vision bit by bit, a step at a time. . . . I had to be true to myself, and the more you take steps, the more they become an integral part of your life. . . . Finally, there were no two worlds for me anymore. I decided there could only be one world, and it came down to which one . . . had more integrity for me, which had more of a promise of change, for everybody.[38]

Author's note

The story of Alan Berkman first attracted me after I read Dick Polman's profile of him, "Story behind the mystery man of the Brink's job," in the *Chicago Tribune*, Jan. 2, 1986, sec. 2, p.1. The information on Dr. Berkman throughout this paper was garnered from a transcript of Polman's interviews with him, given to me by his wife, Dr. Barbara Zeller, and from two letters to me from Dr. Berkman, in response to questions I had for him. While preparing for trial and fighting Hodgkin's disease, Dr. Berkman has been unfailingly gracious and encouraging. Above all, my thanks to Dr. Jerry Israel and our senior seminar.

Notes

[1] William Ayers in Ellen Frankfort, *Kathy Boudin and the Dance of Death* (Briarcliff Manor, N.Y.: Stein & Day, 1983), p. 66.

[2] Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS* (New York: Random House, 1973), pp. 3-5.

[3] Frankfort, p. 80.

[4] *The New York Times*, Oct. 21, 1981, Oct. 22, 1981, Oct. 23, 1981.

[5] Todd Gitlin, "White Heat Underground," *The Nation*, Dec. 19, 1981, p. 672.

[6] Jerry Avorn, *et al.*, "Up Against the Ivy Wall," in William H. Chafe and Harvard Sitkoff, eds., *A History of Our Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 243.

[7] Alan Berkman, letter to the author of April 22, 1986, p. 4.

[8] Peter Collier and David Horowitz, "Doing It: The Inside Story of the Rise and Fall of the Weather Underground," *Rolling Stone*, Sept. 30, 1982, p. 36.

[9] Sale, p. 457.

[10] Collier & Horowitz, p. 22.

[11] Ibid., p. 36.

[12] Sale, p. 664.

[13] Ibid., p. 605.

[14] Selwyn Raab, "New York Doctor Held as Fugitive in Brink's Case," *NYT*, May 25, 1985, Sec. 1, p. 1.

[15] Collier & Horowitz, p. 30.

[16] Berkman, Interview with Dick Polman (Knight-Ridder Newspapers), Holmesburg Prison, Philadelphia, PA, August, 1985.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Berkman, April 22, p. 2.

[19] Stokely Carmichael, "What We Want," *The New York Review of Books*, Sept. 22, 1966, p. 5.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Berkman, Polman interview.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Berkman, April 22, p. 3.

[24] Berkman, Polman interview.

[25] Collier & Horowitz, pp. 35-36.

[26] Ibid.

[27] *Newsweek*, Nov. 2, 1981, p. 32.

[28] Berkman, Polman interview.

[29] Gitlin, p. 672.

[30] Collier & Horowitz, p. 26.

[31] Gitlin, p. 672.

[32] Collier & Horowitz, p. 97.

[33] "A Radical Comes in From the Cold," *Newsweek*, July 21, 1980, p. 35.

[34] "A Fugitive Couple Finally Surrenders," *Newsweek*, Dec. 15, 1980, p. 31.

[35] Collier & Horowitz, p. 29.

[36] Berkman, letter to the author, Feb. 11, 1986, p. 1.

[37] Berkman, Polman interview.

[38] Ibid.

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